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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a 1992 follow-up survey of graduates of Virginia Wesleyan College (VWC). The target population of 1,110 graduates from the classes of 1987 through 1992 were surveyed, and 576 responded (51.9 percent). The survey sought information on demographics, enrollment history, evaluation of cognitive and affective outcomes, overall reactions to college experience, evaluation of educational and support services, continued education, and employment history after graduation. Responding graduates indicated that they were generally satisfied with their educational experiences and with the programs and services provided by the college. Graduates reported that the school fostered personal growth in cognitive and affective areas and that their VWC experiences had adequately prepared them for continued educational pursuits and/or employment. Areas of concern that emerged from the survey included students' experiences in student activities and their preparation in computers, responsibilities of citizenship, application of scientific principles and methods, and applied mathematics. Various college services such as registration process, library services, and cost of attending, also received less favorable evaluations from the graduates. Includes nine tables. (JB)

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Utilizing a Graduate Follow-up Survey
to Assess Institutional Effectiveness
in the Small Liberal Arts College

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a graduate follow-up survey which was recently conducted by a small east coast liberal arts college. The purpose of the survey was to determine if graduates were satisfied with their educational experiences and with the college's programs and services, if they perceived personal growth in cognitive and non-cognitive areas, and if they felt that the college had adequately prepared them for the work force and/or for continued educational pursuits. Results of the survey are presented along with a brief overview of follow-up assessment activities. The information provided in this paper should be useful to other colleges and universities interested in assessing educational outcomes and in utilizing survey methodologies to do so.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, demands on colleges and universities to demonstrate institutional effectiveness have increased greatly. In response, a growing number of institutions have developed comprehensive assessment plans. Assessment of educational outcomes is often a key component of such plans.

Pace (1985) indicated that students should be more knowledgeable after their educational experiences. They should improve their ability to write clearly and effectively, gain a better understanding of themselves and others, develop a greater appreciation of the arts, and acquire an understanding of history and social institutions.

Information provided in Senate Document No. 14 (1986) suggested that the college experience also includes changes in attitudes, in behavior, in value systems, in the inclination toward good citizenship, and in other traits such as discipline and self-control. The report went on to say that one way to assess achievement in these areas is a survey designed to measure the attitudes of students and their level of satisfaction with their educational experiences.

Stevenson, Walleri, and Japely (1985) noted that such a survey is a valuable instrument to determine if, after sufficient time to reflect, graduates are satisfied with the experiences they had in college.

Nichols (1991) further indicated that this type of survey can provide insight into how graduates have developed over time and valuable information concerning their activities since graduation, such as employment experiences and continued educational pursuits.

A small east coast liberal arts college developed a graduate follow-up survey which encompasses all of the areas discussed above. Through the survey, the college sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do graduates evaluate their educational experiences at the college?
2. How do graduates evaluate college programs and services?
3. Did graduates experience personal growth in cognitive and non-cognitive areas as students?
4. Were graduates adequately prepared for employment and continued educational pursuits?

The college conducted its first annual follow-up survey of graduates in 1992. The purpose of this paper is to report the results of that survey.

VWC GRADUATE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at Virginia Wesleyan College (VWC) conducts an annual graduate follow-up survey. In 1992, a follow-up survey of students who graduated from 1987 through 1992 was conducted.

Method

The target population was composed of 1110 graduates. The first group of 547 graduated in 1987, 1989, or 1991 and the second group of 563 graduated in 1988, 1990, or 1992. Initial surveys were sent to the first group in February, 1992 and to the second group in October of the same year. In each case, a second survey was sent approximately one month later to those who could not be identified as respondents to the initial survey. The survey included questions concerning the following areas:

- Demographics
- VWC enrollment history
- Evaluation of cognitive and affective outcomes
- Overall reactions to college experiences
- Evaluation of educational and support services
- Continued educational experiences
- Employment history after graduation

A total of 576 completed surveys were returned for an overall return rate of 51.9 percent.

Results

A complete description of the results of the 1992 VWC graduate follow-up survey have been reported elsewhere (Virginia Wesleyan College, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 1992). While space does not permit a complete description of the findings here, selected results will be presented.

Demographic Profile. The VWC graduate follow-up survey includes several items designed to collect general demographic information. These data are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

Over 65 percent of responding graduates were traditional-age students (18 - 23 years of age). Over 70 percent were female and 93 percent were Caucasian-American.

VWC Enrollment Data. The survey also contains several items designed to collect VWC enrollment information. These data are illustrated in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 Here

Respondents most often indicated that they decided to attend VWC because of its size and location. Over one-half of respondents transferred from other colleges or universities.

Nearly three-fourths were commuters at some time during their VWC experience and nearly 60 percent commuted the entire time. Over 61 percent of responding graduates were enrolled at VWC for seven or more semesters.

Cognitive/Affective Outcomes. The survey asks a series of questions regarding students' perceptions of the cognitive and affective outcomes of their college experiences. A majority of respondents reported gains or improvements in 15 of the 20 areas represented in the survey. Data related to areas in which respondents reported substantial growth are displayed in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 Here

Over 77 percent indicated that their experiences at VWC had helped broaden their knowledge of the liberal arts. Approximately three-fourths indicated that they had experienced personal growth in their abilities to work cooperatively in a group and to develop and utilize critical thinking skills. Over 72 percent cited improvement in written communication skills and in their ability to learn actively rather than passively. Over 70 percent reported personal growth in their ability to understand different philosophies, cultures, and faith perspectives.

Data related to areas in which respondents indicated low levels of positive growth can be seen in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 Here

These included the following: participating in student activities, knowing how to use computers, understanding the responsibilities of citizenship, understanding and applying scientific principles and methods, and understanding and applying mathematics in daily activities.

Overall Reactions to VWC. Several survey items deal with graduates' overall reactions to the college. These data are displayed in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 Here

Over 91 percent of respondents indicated that apart from the financial benefit, VWC had helped improve the quality of their life. Nearly 79 percent indicated that they would attend VWC again and over 84 percent would recommend it to friends. Over 65 percent reported that the quality of education provided by VWC was better than that provided by other colleges or universities they had attended.

Evaluation of Educational and Support Services. The survey also includes a series of items related to respondents' evaluations of a variety of educational and support services at VWC. Data related to items which received very favorable ratings from responding graduates are displayed in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 Here

Over 97 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the size of classes. Over 95 percent were satisfied with the friendliness of faculty and staff and over 94 percent were satisfied with the size of the college, its location, and the helpfulness and individual attention of faculty. Over 91 percent expressed satisfaction with the quality of instruction.

Data related to items receiving less favorable evaluations can be seen in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 Here

These included the registration process, the availability of computers and computer labs, library services, college rules and regulations, career planning and placement services, the quality of food/service in the dining center, freshman seminar, and the cost of attending the college.

Continued Educational Experiences. Another component of the survey deals with graduates' educational experiences after VWC. These data are included in Table 8.

Insert Table 8 Here

Nearly one-third of respondents indicated that they had continued their education after graduating from VWC. Over two-thirds of these have earned/are pursuing professional or graduate degrees. Nearly 97 percent of responding graduates indicated that VWC had adequately prepared them for continued educational pursuits.

Employment Since Graduation. The final component of the survey deals with respondents' employment experiences since graduation. These data are illustrated in Table 9.

Insert Table 9 Here

Nearly 72 percent of respondents indicated that they are either employed full-time, self-employed, or in the military. Over 89 percent indicated that their VWC experiences had adequately prepared them for employment. Nearly 63 percent reported that their current job is moderately or closely related to their major at VWC.

Discussion

The results of the graduate follow-up survey reported here provide initial answers to the basic questions put forth earlier. In general, responding graduates indicated that they were satisfied with their educational experiences at VWC and with the programs and services provided by the college. They also reported personal growth in a variety of cognitive and affective areas. In addition, respondents indicated that

their VWC experiences had adequately prepared them for continued educational pursuits and/or employment. Thus, the results of the survey provide important evidence that the college is doing an effective job in helping students achieve key educational outcomes. However, findings also revealed several areas of concern which must be addressed if the college is to be truly effective.

The results also confirm that the methodology employed in this project can be a valuable component of an overall effort to assess an institution's effectiveness.

Conclusions

The results of this survey help answer the four major questions posed earlier to assess the college's effectiveness in providing educational programs and support services which enable students to achieve desired educational outcomes. The survey demonstrated that, at least at one small liberal arts college, graduates are generally satisfied with their educational experiences and with college programs and services, have experienced personal growth in a variety of cognitive and affective areas, and are prepared for employment and continued education.

Although the methodologies employed here provided valuable information regarding the overall effectiveness of the college, other assessment efforts are needed to further investigate those areas of concern revealed by the results.

Several such efforts were undertaken recently. First, a group of 30 faculty and staff members attended a retreat in a quiet, secluded setting where they participated in two days of intensive discussions about the survey results and other issues related to student satisfaction and retention. They identified critical concerns and developed plans to address them. Consequently, a survey of current students, staff, and faculty was conducted to take a closer look at potential problem areas and to elicit suggestions for change and/or improvement. This survey was followed by focus group discussions and other surveys to further pinpoint problem areas and to seek solutions.

The results of this study indicate that the survey described in this paper can be an important component of a systematic effort to assess institutional effectiveness and may be of considerable value as a model for other colleges and universities.

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Table 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

	Number of Responses*	Percent
<u>Age Group</u> (n = 568)		
18 - 23 years of age	372	65.5%
24 years of age and older	196	34.5
<u>Gender</u> (n = 564)		
Female	397	70.4%
Male	167	29.6
<u>Ethnic Distribution</u> (n = 559)		
Caucasian-American/White	520	93.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	16	2.9
African-American/Black	13	2.3
Hispanic	3	0.5
Other/Unknown	7	1.3

* Calculations for this table were based on the actual number responding to each item.

Table 2

VWC ENROLLMENT DATA

	Number of Responses*	Percent
<u>Reasons Most Often Given for Selecting VWC**</u>		
Size of the college	182	31.6%
Location of the college	153	26.6
Availability of scholarships/ financial aid	71	12.3
Academic programs offered	69	12.0
Academic reputation	68	11.8
<u>Began Studies at VWC (n = 576)</u>		
Yes	286	49.7%
No	290	50.3
<u>Student Residence (n = 576)</u>		
Commuted	344	59.7%
VWC student housing	147	25.5
Both	85	14.8
<u>Semesters Enrolled (n = 561)</u>		
2 to 4	86	15.3%
5 to 6	132	23.5
7 to 8	286	50.9
9 to 10	47	8.4
over 10	10	1.8

* Calculations for this table were based on the actual number responding to each item.

** Multiple response item; numbers and percentages are not additive.

Table 3

PERSONAL GROWTH AREAS RECEIVING POSITIVE EVALUATIONS

	Number of Responses Positive Neutral Negative			
Gaining an understanding of the liberal arts	572	77.4%	18.4%	4.2%
Working in a group	566	75.8	18.6	5.7
Developing critical thinking skills	566	74.6	21.2	4.3
Writing clearly & effectively	570	72.4	20.4	7.2
Learning actively rather than passively	563	72.3	20.6	7.1
Understanding other philosophies & cultures	571	70.4	23.3	6.4

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very much to none. Thus, the "positive" column includes "very much" and "quite a bit" responses combined and the "negative" column includes "very little" and "none" responses combined. The "neutral" column contains "somewhat" responses.

Table 4

PERSONAL GROWTH AREAS RECEIVING LESS FAVORABLE EVALUATIONS

	Number of Responses Positive Neutral Negative			
Participating in student activities	541	44.9%	32.0%	23.1%
Understanding how to use computers	543	43.1	28.5	28.4
Learning citizenship responsibilities	563	39.5	37.5	23.1
Utilizing scientific principles/methods	549	37.5	38.4	24.0
Understanding and applying mathematics in daily life	554	30.1	34.8	35.1

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very much to none. Thus, the "positive" column includes "very much" and "quite a bit" responses combined and the "negative" column includes "very little" and "none" responses combined. The "neutral" column contains "somewhat" responses.

Table 5
SATISFACTION WITH VWC OVERALL

	Number of Responses*	Percent
<u>VWC Improved Quality of Life (n=572)</u>		
Definitely	354	61.9%
Probably	168	29.4
Uncertain	32	5.6
Probably not	13	2.3
Definitely not	5	0.9
<u>Would Attend VWC Again (n=573)</u>		
Definitely	299	52.2%
Probably	152	26.5
Uncertain	68	11.9
Probably not	33	5.8
Definitely not	21	3.7
<u>Would Recommend VWC to Friends (n=571)</u>		
Yes	482	84.4%
Unsure	70	12.3
No	19	3.3
<u>Quality of VWC Education (n=563)</u>		
Much better	145	25.8%
Better	222	39.4
About the same	106	18.8
Worse	15	2.7
Uncertain	75	13.3

* Calculations for this table were based on the actual number responding to each item.

Table 6

ASPECTS OF VWC RECEIVING VERY POSITIVE EVALUATIONS

	Number of Responses	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Size of classes	570	97.2%	2.3%	0.5%
Faculty friendliness	568	95.3	3.2	1.6
Faculty helpfulness	569	94.7	4.2	1.1
College location	566	94.5	4.9	0.5
Size of college	566	94.2	4.6	1.2
Quality-instruction	567	91.2	6.9	1.9

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Thus, the "satisfied" column includes "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses combined and the "dissatisfied" column includes "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" responses combined.

Table 7

ASPECTS OF VWC RECEIVING LESS FAVORABLE EVALUATIONS

	Number of Responses	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Registration process	567	57.7%	21.0%	21.3%
Computers/labs	498	52.2	26.7	21.1
Library Services	564	51.8	24.6	23.6
Rules/regulations	542	43.2	37.5	19.4
Career planning	506	37.5	33.6	28.9
Dining Center	469	37.5	41.8	20.7
Freshman seminar	400	31.5	43.3	25.3
Cost of attending	559	25.8	31.1	43.1

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Thus, the "satisfied" column includes "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses combined and the "dissatisfied" column includes "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" responses combined.

Table 8
CONTINUED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

	Number of Responses	Percent
<u>Attended College after VWC*</u>		
Yes	190	33.0%
No/Unknown	386	67.0
<u>Reason Continued Education</u>		
To obtain a professional/graduate degree	127	66.8%
To obtain/maintain certification/license	36	18.9
To improve job skills or knowledge	13	6.8
To take courses for self-improvement	6	3.2
Other/Unknown	8	4.2
<u>VWC Preparation for Continued Education</u>		
Excellent	85	44.7%
More than adequate	57	30.0
Adequate	42	22.1
Less than adequate	3	1.6
Unknown	3	1.6

* 190 yes responses to this item were the basis for other calculations in this table.

Table 9
EMPLOYMENT PROFILE

	Number of Responses*	Percent
<u>Current Employment Status (n = 557)</u>		
Employed full-time	375	67.3%
Employed part-time	58	10.4
Self-employed	13	2.3
Military	12	2.2
Unemployed	48	8.6
Other	51	9.2
<u>VWC Preparation for Employment (n = 441)</u>		
Excellent	102	23.1%
More than adequate	146	33.1
Adequate	145	32.9
Less than adequate	21	4.8
Poor	27	6.1
<u>Relation of Current Job to Major (n = 455)</u>		
Closely related	204	44.8%
Moderately related	82	18.0
Slightly related	65	14.3
Not related	104	22.9

* Calculations for this table were based on the actual number responding to each item.